

# *The Status of the Real Estate Occupied by Christianity in Chengdu during the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China—Based on the Deeds in Chengdu*

Mimi Wang

*Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, Chengdu, Sichuan, 610072, China*

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**Abstract:** This article sorts out a large number of real estate deeds in Chengdu during the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China by Catholics and Christians (Protestants) who purchased real estate for churches, schools, and hospitals in Chengdu during this period by sorting out and reading the land deeds collected by Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Planning and Natural Resources. Christianity occupied a large amount of land, houses, and other assets in Chengdu, fully demonstrating its invasion of the provincial capital city. However, the establishment of its mission hospitals and mission schools also objectively promoted the development of Sichuan's medical and educational circles.

## 1. Introduction

Christianity is the collective name for the various sects that believe in Jesus as the savior. It is also known as the three major religions in the world along with Buddhism and Islam. In a broad sense, Christianity refers to the collective name of the Christian religion that includes the three major sects of Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, as well as some other small sects; in a narrow sense, Christianity specifically refers to the Protestant religion among them. In China, Roman Catholicism is usually called Catholicism, Orthodoxy is called Orthodoxy, and Protestantism is called Christianity or Jesus Christ. Sichuan is located in an inland area with congested transportation and a relatively backward economy compared with coastal areas. However, Sichuan has had a strong religious atmosphere since ancient times. It is the birthplace of Taoism and is dotted with famous temples and ancient temples. Various religions have many believers here. Therefore, Catholicism and Christianity have developed more fully in Sichuan than in other parts of China. Since the Opium War, foreign invaders have gradually gained the privilege of entering China to preach and build churches, mission schools, mission hospitals, and almshouses. The Chinese rulers also authorized missionaries to rent and buy land in various provinces and build their buildings. Through the real estate deeds of the church's purchases and leases of houses and fields in the local area, we can get a glimpse of the property acquisition situation and the spread and development process of Catholicism and Christianity in the area.

In 1952, Chengdu City carried out real estate clearance and renewal work and received and collected more than 400,000 old house deeds submitted by Chengdu people. These real estate deeds date from the 30th year of Kangxi's reign in the Qing Dynasty to 1952, spanning more than 260 years

of history. Although the property deed is only a thin page, it records information such as the buyer and seller of the property transaction, the location of the property, the size and layout of the property, the purchase and sale price, the transaction time, and witnesses. These old house deeds, which have not been modified in literature, are first-hand materials for studying the historical appearance of Chengdu during the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China. These precious deeds are now stored in the Archives Office of the Chengdu Bureau of Municipal Planning and Natural Resources. This batch of property deeds contains a large number of real estate deeds for the church to purchase and lease houses and fields. The church uses the acquired properties as building sites for churches, schools, hospitals, and charitable institutions. Fu Chongju, a native of the Qing Dynasty, said that in Chengdu at the end of the Qing Dynasty, "the church's property in Huayang consisted of more than 240 houses and more than 520 acres of farmland." <sup>[1]</sup> This shows the prosperity of the property owned by the Christian church in Chengdu. Through the Chengdu real estate deeds left over from the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, we can sort out the industrial status and real estate uses purchased by Catholics and Christians in Chengdu, and learn about the spread and development process of Christianity in Chengdu, as well as the church's contribution to education, medicine and other undertakings in Sichuan. These deeds will help us to gain a concrete image understanding of these issues.

## **2. The Catholic Church and the Spread of Catholicism**

Catholicism has been developing continuously since it was introduced to Sichuan in 1640. After the Opium War, the Qing government relaxed the ban on Catholicism and lifted the prohibition measures, and Catholic power rose rapidly. Since the opening of the port, France has gradually obtained the right to protect Christianity, and Catholic activities in Sichuan are controlled by French missionaries. Under the authorization of the Holy See, the Paris Foreign Missionary Society monopolized the Catholic missionary work in Sichuan. The church adheres to rigid and conservative missionary concepts and ignores the use of education, medical care, language, and other missionary methods. According to the house deeds, French missionaries purchased a large amount of real estate in the Chengdu area, mainly as construction land for Catholic churches to develop believers. According to the analysis of the transaction time recorded in the land deed, the purchase of land and real estate by the Catholic Church was mainly distributed between the Tongzhi and the Republic of China periods, with the highest concentration in the late Guangxu period, earlier than that of the Protestant Church.

### **2.1 Ping'an Bridge Catholic Church**

The property deed files show that Shengxiu Church (Catholic Church) was sold for 130 taels, 500 taels, and 700 taels respectively in the 13th year of Tongzhi (1874), the 34th year of Guangxu (1908), and the eighth year of the Republic of China (1919). Prices were used to purchase properties such as shops and houses on Qinglong Street, Wufu Street, and Ziku Street in Chengdu County to build churches. These properties are located in and around the present-day Pinganqiao Catholic Church, and it is inferred that they should belong to the properties purchased by the present-day Pinganqiao Catholic Church. The church originally built here was destroyed in the "Chengdu Anti-Church Movement" in 1895. In 1904, French Bishop Duhem presided over it, and French priest Roushouse designed and supervised the construction. After ten years, the largest Chinese and Western Catholic church in Chengdu, Ping'an Bridge Catholic Church, was built. This church has always been the center of Catholicism in western Sichuan. Because some believers had used the power of the church to act recklessly and clashed with the people, causing a serious "Anti-Church Movement." Therefore, although the interior of Ping'an Bridge Catholic Church is in the style of a classical Roman church,

the exterior adopts a Chinese style. Its gate is made of green bricks and sloping roofs, which is very similar to the gates of temples and government offices. This visually alleviates the conflict between Western culture and traditional Chinese culture. Its architectural style is unique among Chinese Catholic churches. Ping'an Bridge Catholic Church has an excellent geographical location, located in the center of ancient Chengdu, west of the imperial city. It is large in scale, covering an area of nearly 30 acres and a construction area of 8,508 square meters. Ping'an Bridge Catholic Church includes large and small chapels, Immaculate Conception Church, and the Bishop's Office. The church is in the shape of "十", the bishop's palace is in the shape of "shu", and the entire building complex is in the shape of "song". The shape is unique, simple, and elegant. The Immaculate Conception Church can accommodate more than a thousand people, and the chapel is dedicated to bishops and priests. The surrounding corridors are spacious and connected, and the 108 nanmu pillars are magnificent. The three courtyard gardens divide the main church and the Immaculate Conception Church into formal corridors. It is surrounded by 104 rooms on two floors, divided into living rooms, dining rooms, office areas, and dormitories. It can be seen from the house deed that after the Ping'an Bridge Catholic Church was built in the 30th year of Guangxu (1904), the church continued to purchase land and housing assets near the church to expand its power. In the 34th year of Guangxu (1908) and the eighth year of the Republic of China (1919) He successively purchased residences, shops, and other assets near the church.

## 2.2 Other Catholic churches

In addition to the Ping'an Bridge Catholic Church, the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Planning and Natural Resources also preserves land purchase contracts for many Catholic churches such as Zhangjia Lane, Guiwang Bridge, Qinglian Street, and Zhushi Lane (figure 1). According to the property deed files, the Catholic Church purchased two properties worth 1,200 taels and 1,120 taels respectively in Zhangjia Lane outside Beimen in the 29th year of Guangxu (1903) and the 31st year of Guangxu (1905). The location here is outside the north gate of the city wall and is relatively remote. The property was originally a mill building and a thatched house, and the price was relatively low. However, the transaction prices shown in the two property deeds are both very high, which shows that the real estate purchased in these two purchases was very large. The French Catholic Church in Zhangjia Lane was built in the 27th year of Guangxu (1901) and still exists today. In 1906, the French Catholic Church also built a mission hospital here to treat and bury poor and seriously ill people free of charge. In 1911, the church built the Pasteur Institute of Bacteriology here to produce rabies vaccine and smallpox serum. It was the earliest microbiology research institute in Chengdu. In addition, the land purchase contracts for Qinglianshangjie Street Catholic Church, Guiwang Bridge Catholic Church, and Zhushi Street Catholic Church are also preserved in the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Planning and Natural Resources. According to the property deeds collected by the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Land Planning and Natural Resources, the development of Catholicism in Chengdu mainly involves purchasing land and houses to build Catholic churches and developing congregations. There was relatively little construction of mission schools and hospitals. Catholic churches are located in and outside Chengdu city, and the overall location is very good. The large-scale purchase of real estate by the Catholic Church mainly occurred in the late Guangxu period.



Figure 1: The purchase contract of the Catholic Church in Zhangjia Lane in 1905

### 3. Christian schools and hospital assets

Christianity entered Sichuan later than Catholicism. After the Opium War, the Qing government signed a series of unequal treaties with the imperialist powers, and Christian missionary activities in China became increasingly legal. The signing of the "Huangpu Treaty" in 1844 enabled the Qing government to lift the ban on Christianity;<sup>[2]</sup> the signing of the "Tianjin Treaty" in 1858, missionaries were allowed to enter the mainland to preach;<sup>[3]</sup> the "Beijing Renewal" in 1860 allowed missionaries to rent and buy fields in various provinces and the privilege of building at their convenience. The signing of these unequal treaties paved the way for the spread and development of Christianity in Sichuan. Christianity entered Sichuan in 1876, and sects such as the Inland Mission, the Wesleyan Sect, the Anglican Sect, and the Gongyi Sect entered Sichuan to preach.

In addition to regular missionary activities, education, and medical care are also important components of missionary work. Although Catholicism entered Sichuan earlier, its medical and educational undertakings lagged far behind Christianity, and its scale and influence were inferior to the latter. Christian missionaries established the first university in Sichuan, West China Union University. The church also attaches great importance to women's education, early childhood education, and special education, and has established school institutions such as Huamei Girls' Middle School, Shuji Children's Academy, and School for the Blind and Mute. In the medical field, the church established hospitals and opened medical schools, which promoted the spread and development of Western medical science and technology in Sichuan. Therefore, the church's missionary activities have played a positive role that cannot be ignored in promoting the progress of medical care, education, and other undertakings in Sichuan.

The Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Land Planning and Natural Resources preserves the deeds for the purchase of land and houses by Christian religious organizations such as the Methodist Church, the British Quaker Church, the Anglican Church, the Chinese Anglican Church, and the Anglo-American Church (Chinese Christian Church). The purchased land is usually used for churches, schools, hospitals, etc., among which education and medical land account for a high proportion.

#### 3.1 Five Missions School—the establishment of West China Union University

Among the real estate properties purchased by the Christian Church in the house deed files, the

Anglo-American Church has the largest number of permanently leased properties outside the south gate of Chengdu city. From the Guangxu period to the Republic of China, dozens of real estate properties were purchased. These real estate properties are mainly used as construction land for West China Union University (table 1).

Table 1: Part of the real estate purchased by West China Union University

Transaction time(year)	Seller	Buyer	Location	Real estate type	Price
1908	Mrs. Zhangbao	Anglo-American Church	near Niuwang Temple	houses, paddy fields	78 taels
1909	Zhengrong Shu	Anglo-American Church	/	land	6 Yuan
1909	Mrs. Zhongjiang	Anglo-American Church	near Chaoyang Temple	land	125 taels
1913	Yubing He	Anglo-American Church	near Niuwang Temple	cemetery	400 Yuan
1915	Mrs. Yangshen	Anglo-American Church	/	paddy fields	4628 taels
1917	Huanggang County Wenchang Association	Anglo-American Church	near Nantai Temple	paddy fields	438 taels
1917	Xiexuguang Xie Family	Anglo-American Church	near Niuwang Temple	land	120 Yuan
1918	Wananhe Family	Anglo-American Church	near Niuwang Temple	paddy fields	7550 taels
1919	Bai Leyang Temple	Anglo-American Church	at the foot of Santai Mountain	paddy fields	1300 taels
1920	Rongsen Che	Anglo-American Church	near Nantai Temple	cemetery	90 Yuan
1920	Hongxing Yang	Anglo-American Church	near Nantai Temple	cemetery	80 Yuan
1920	Mrs. Qichen	Anglo-American Church	near Nantai Temple	cemetery	1800 Yuan
1922	Runzhi Zhou	Anglo-American Church	near Nantai Temple	cemetery	90 Yuan
1926	Shaobo Tang	Anglo-American Church	/	houses	7943.6619 Yuan
1929	Zongwan Zhang	Anglo-American Church	Xiaotianzhu Street	paddy fields	9503.67 Yuan

In 1905, the Christian Chinese Educational Association established a branch in West China and began to prepare for the establishment of church primary and secondary schools, universities, and normal schools. Later, the Christian Church purchased land in the south of the city and built a school building. In 1910, the university was officially established and named West China Union University. It was co-founded by five Christian "missions" from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, namely the Anglo-American Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the Quaker Church, and the Anglican Church. Therefore, it is also known as the "Five Missions School". Its organization imitates the organizational system of Oxford and Cambridge and implements a school-building system. Each mission association establishes a school building separately and is

responsible for its management. West China Union University is a comprehensive university focusing on medicine and dentistry, with equal emphasis on arts and sciences. According to this batch of Chengdu real estate deed files collected by the Chengdu Bureau of Municipal Planning and Natural Resources, West China Union University purchased a large amount of land for the establishment of the school. The purchases were frequent, the funds involved were large, and the period was very long, starting from the 30th year of Guangxu (1908) to the 18th year of the Republic of China (1929), land was continuously purchased for school construction and expansion. West China Union University is one of the birthplaces of modern higher medical education in China. Its establishment has greatly promoted the development of higher education in southwest China.

### **3.2 Methodist Association and its educational and medical activities**

More than a dozen contracts for the purchase of real estate by the Methodist Association can be seen in the property deed files. The lots are mainly located near Shaanxi Street in Chengyi and Hongmen Street outside of the south city gate. On Shaanxi Street are the Gospel Hall and Cunren Hospital founded by the Methodist Church, and on Hongmen Street are the Huamei Girls' High School founded by them. The Gospel Hall and Cunren Hospital are located on the north side of Shaanxi Street. The Gospel Hall was founded in the sixth year of Guangxu (1880) and is the earliest Christian gospel hall established in Chengdu. Cunren Hospital was founded in the 20th year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1894) by the American missionary James Gamble. It is one of the earliest Western medicine hospitals in Chengdu and the largest ENT specialist hospital in China. The tall bell tower of Cunren Hospital is the tallest building in the city center. This bell tower and the clocks on it changed the tradition of the Chengdu people's earthly branches and became the "social clock" of Chengdu. Opposite Cunren Hospital is the Chinese Middle School founded by the Methodist Association. Hua Middle School was founded in Chongqing and later moved to Shaanxi Street, Chengdu. It is a specialized girls' school with high teaching quality. It can be seen from the land deed files that Huamei School purchased land on Hongmen Street many times to expand the school's foundation.

In addition, deeds for the purchase of land by church organizations such as the Quakers, Anglican Church, and Chinese Anglican Church can also be found in the property deed files. (LS 24626, LS24660) The Christian Church has widely established schools and hospitals in Chengdu. In addition to West China Union University and Huaying Middle School, there are also Furen Society, Guangyi Society, West China Union Normal School, Huaying Girls' School, Blind Dumb Schools, and other school organizations. In addition to Cunren Hospital, they also founded Renji Hospital, Gospel Women's Hospital, and other hospital institutions.

### **4. Conclusion**

Since modern times, imperialism has continuously invaded China and forced the Qing government to sign a series of unequal treaties in an attempt to turn China into an imperialist colony. Imperialism's missionary activities to China are a means of invading China culturally to achieve the purpose of controlling China. Christianity occupies a large amount of land, houses, and other assets in Chengdu, fully demonstrating its invasion of the provincial capital city. The time when the church purchased real estate as shown in the house deeds was mainly concentrated in the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China. The properties and land it purchased were mainly used to build churches, mission schools, and mission hospitals. Among them, Catholicism was introduced to Sichuan early, and the land it purchased was mainly used to build Catholic churches. The time was concentrated in the late Qing Dynasty, especially the Guangxu period. Christianity was introduced to Sichuan relatively late, and its missionary methods were prominently reflected in the establishment of missionary schools

and missionary hospitals. In the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, Christians purchased large amounts of land to build schools and hospitals. The establishment of West China Union University is a typical example. It is undeniable that missionary activities also objectively brought advanced Western ideas, culture, science, and technology to closed and conservative feudal China. This played a positive role in accelerating the disintegration of China's feudal society and promoting China's modernization process. Among them, the establishment of mission hospitals and mission schools was an important means for Western missionaries to carry out missionary activities, and they were also the two most representative undertakings that brought advanced Western ideas and technologies to China. The objectively outstanding contribution that missionary activities have made to Sichuan's medical and educational circles cannot be ignored. Through the house deed data preserved in the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Land Planning and Natural Resources, we can see the encroachment of Christianity on Chengdu's real estate assets and its promotion of Chengdu's modernization process in medicine and education.

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